

Undergraduate Course Description Packet
August Intersession 2021
Updated: 3/16/21

ENGL 4933-002, Studies in Popular Culture and Popular Genres: *Shakespeare in Film*

Instructor: D. Stephens

Textbooks Required:

Each student must have a subscription to Prime Video; if timed correctly, this may be obtained as a free one-month trial that covers the dates of the course. Information is here, under “See More Plans” (three lines below the orange “Try Prime” button):

https://www.amazon.com/amazonprime?_encoding=UTF8&pd_rd_r=ce6f99f1-b9cb-4ff6-85fc-d80d65691ced&pd_rd_w=zi5Kz&pd_rd_wg=7XCJZ&qid=1601330401

Ed. Greenblatt, Stephen, *The Norton Shakespeare* eBook. This required text will appear on Blackboard as an e-book at the start of the semester. The price is being negotiated, but it will be around \$35. Your student account will be charged approximately a week after the semester begins. If you already have a copy of the complete *Norton Shakespeare*, or of a recent edition of the *Riverside* or *Pelican* complete Shakespeare, we can arrange for you to opt out of having your student account charged

Description: We will read four plays by Shakespeare and watch many film adaptations of these works—some at full length and many more as clips. Here is a sampling: we will analyze Asta Nielsen’s 1921 *Hamlet* starring herself, and we will compare modern Hamlets played by David Tennant, Patrick Stewart, Benedict Cumberbatch, Adrian Lester, and Andrew Scott. We will look at selections from Aki Kaurismaki’s *Finnish Hamlet Goes Business* and Kurosawa’s *The Bad Sleep Well*. We will view *The Tempest* in a science-fiction adaptation and in a stop-motion puppet production. We will see Caliban played as everything from a hairy, white-skinned Neanderthal to an angrily proud colonial slave. We will familiarize ourselves with adaptations of *Twelfth Night* that include Dinita Gohil playing Viola in a sari and an all-male stage production featuring Mark Rylance in a Tudor dress and Stephen Fry in yellow stockings. We will analyze a 1911 *Merchant of Venice* with a Shylock played as a grotesquely stereotyped Jew and watch Al Pacino’s culturally complex portrayal of Shylock in 2004, asking ourselves what it means that this production elides Portia’s racism. We will not search for the “best” version of each play or criticize productions for not being “faithful” to the written texts; instead, we will use our literary-critical powers to discuss how each director uses the materials of cinema to give a particular interpretation of a play, how each director’s interpretation speaks to and from its cultural moment, and what that director’s interpretation means to us in terms of the intersectional issues of today. We will read half of a play each night; class time will consist of discussion and film-watching, but there will be some lectures.

No *specific* prior knowledge of Shakespeare is required, but students should already be fairly comfortable with reading Shakespeare’s language, because this class is not an introduction to

Shakespeare. If you have taken a prior high-school or college course that included a few Shakespeare plays, you should be fine

Essays, exams, and other major requirements for undergraduates: due to the time constraints of Intersession, there will not be a full-length essay requirement. Instead, there will be very short writing assignments—some at home, some in class—and a final exam. Active and consistent class participation will be the central requirement, but the class will be relaxed and mutually supportive in this regard.